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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000333

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES SECURITY ISSUES WITH INTERIOR
MINISTER SHAIKH RASHID

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador, in a February 12 meeting with Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, discussed recent Ashoora celebrations in Bahrain, reviewed worldwide reactions to the release of Danish cartoon depiction's of the Muslim Prophet Mohammed, and was provided with an update on the status of the Joint Counterterrorism Center. The Minister and MOI officials provided background on a case involving allegations of police abuse, concluding the allegations had not held up under investigation. End summary.

Ashoora celebrations in Bahrain

2. (C) The Ambassador began the meeting by offering his congratulations on the orderly celebrations surrounding the recent Ashoora holiday. The Minister confirmed the celebrations were peaceful, suggesting it was yet another example of how things had changed in Bahrain. While there were no significant incidents reported during the Ashoora celebrations and no reported injuries or property damage, the Minister highlighted one recent incident involving protesters gathering in response to the Danish cartoon depicting the Muslim Prophet Mohammed. During one peaceful protest, newly established community police units identified and took immediate action to remove American and Israeli flags located on the ground adjacent to a Danish flag. While it was not uncommon to see or hear the occasional anti-American sentiment during such protests, the Minister stated authorities had not identified any strong anti-American focus in any of the protests.

Worldwide Protests Against Danish Cartoon

3. (C) The Minister went on to suggest the reactions to the Danish cartoons were "not a pure Danish pastry", suggesting possible involvement by both Iranian and Syrian authorities to arouse anti-western passions. Shaikh Rashid assured the Ambassador his office would closely monitor the impact ongoing events worldwide were having in Bahrain and notify the Embassy of any specific threat or concerns. To date, protests in Bahrain have been limited and non-violent.

Continued Concerns Over Iran

4. (C) the Ambassador raised the issue of Iran's nuclear program. Shaikh Rashid stated he was in agreement with the recommendation to move the issue to the U.N. Security Council. While he agreed to a country's right to pursue such technology in the interest of civilian use, he stated Iran was using the program to raise nationalist issues and he believed they had every intention of pursuing a weapons program. He suggested that with Israel possessing nuclear weapons, it should be no surprise that Iran would use the argument of needing a counter force within the Muslim world. Unfortunately, the Iranian government tended to think of itself more as Shia rather than Muslim. Shaikh Rashid raised the importance of continued international pressure and the need to work closely with Bahrain and other Gulf nations to prepare contingency plans to counter the growing threat from Iran. The Minister highlighted the significance of the recent Eagle Resolve exercise and stressed the need for similar exercises in the immediate future in order to establish, among other things, regional integrated air defenses.

Joint Counterterrorism Center

5. (C) On the Joint Counterterrorism Center (JCTC), Public Security Chief General Abdul Latif Zayani said the structure scheduled to house the center is still undergoing renovations, equipment needs have been identified and purchase orders submitted, and staffing levels are being

finalized. The Ambassador reiterated the importance of moving forward on the establishment of the JCTC as quickly as possible, and urged the Minister to continue to give his full support for the center.

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Musa Abd Ali Case
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16. (C) Finally, the Ambassador raised the issue of Musa Abd Ali, the Bahraini national who claimed to have been abducted and abused by security forces. The Minister said the case was thoroughly investigated by Ministry of Interior staff and had been turned over to the General Attorney's office for follow-up. Shaikh Rashid commented that it was police officials who originally persuaded Ali to formally report the allegations and aggressively pursued the case in an effort to identify the alleged assailants. After a thorough investigation, the Minister stated he believed the allegations were completely false, suggesting the entire incident was fabricated. The Minister then asked MOI investigators to review the status of the case with the Ambassador.

17. (C) Public Security Chief Zayani took the Ambassador to his office and called in two independent British Crime advisors who had observed the investigation of the case, to provide a detailed account of the case. They were subsequently joined by the Chief Bahraini investigator responsible for the case. In separate accounts, they outlined inconsistencies in the allegations and their conclusion that, based on what they learned, the incident did not take place. A more detailed explanation of the meeting has been sent to the Department via separate channels.
MONROE